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Interaction between the United Nations, national parliaments and the Inter-Parliamentary Union

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Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

In December 2010, the General Assembly adopted resolution 65/123 on cooperation between the United Nations, national parliaments and the Inter-Parliamentary Union. The resolution builds on the institutional relationship between the United Nations and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) that has developed over the past decade and recommends a more structured parliamentary component to the work of the United Nations.

In the resolution, the General Assembly decided to include in the provisional agenda of its sixty-sixth session a stand-alone item entitled "Interaction between the United Nations, national parliaments and the Inter-Parliamentary Union". By modifying the title of the item and adding national parliaments and stressing interaction rather than cooperation, Member States signified their wish to explore in greater depth the ways in which national parliaments can contribute to the work of the United Nations. The formulation confirms that IPU, the world organization of national parliaments, will continue to play a pivotal role in fostering this relationship.

This report catalogues some of the modalities and examples of interaction between the United Nations, national parliaments and IPU covering the period since the adoption of the 2010 resolution. It also makes recommendations on how the United Nations system could more systematically engage with national parliaments in specific areas. A comprehensive list of activities carried out during this period is presented in the annex to the present report.

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I. Introduction

1. The United Nations and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) have developed increasingly close ties of cooperation since the two organizations concluded a cooperation agreement in 1996. Reinforced by the Millennium Declaration, which called for further strengthening of cooperation, the relationship has become increasingly institutionalized and the General Assembly has granted permanent observer status to IPU.

2. IPU is the world organization of national parliaments. One hundred and fifty-nine parliaments are members of the organization and take part in its activities. IPU helps strengthen parliaments and build parliamentary capacity to legislate and hold Governments to account.

3. IPU promotes greater international involvement of parliaments. It develops a parliamentary dimension to international cooperation, enhances transparency and accountability of global processes and mobilizes parliamentary action on major global challenges. Undoubtedly, in an international system increasingly built on the principles of the rule of law and democratic governance, a more robust parliamentary engagement internationally is desirable to identify possible solutions to major global issues and work towards their implementation.

4. Cooperation between the United Nations and IPU serves the purpose of helping to mobilize greater parliamentary support for the United Nations and for the implementation of multilateral agreements. Equally, it brings a unique parliamentary perspective to United Nations consultations and decisions on the main global issues of our time. Ultimately, strengthening the interaction between the United Nations, national parliaments and IPU helps bridge the democracy gap in international relations.

II. Political interaction at the Inter-Parliamentary Union between parliaments and the United Nations

5. Since 2010, IPU assemblies have continued to provide opportunities for senior United Nations officials to engage with a broad spectrum of legislators on global issues that are high on the United Nations agenda. The Secretary-General, the President of the General Assembly, senior United Nations Secretariat officials, heads of specialized agencies and high representatives have attended IPU assemblies, raising awareness and building political support for major processes under way at the United Nations.

Interaction with senior United Nations officials

6. The Secretary-General delivered a keynote address at the opening of the 125th IPU Assembly in Bern in October 2011. In his remarks, the Secretary-General drew attention to the need for greater political accountability and encouraged a strong parliamentary involvement in the process leading up to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20 Conference) in 2012.

7. The President of the General Assembly attended the 124th IPU Assembly in Panama City in April 2011, at which he took part in a debate with speakers and parliamentary leaders on global economic governance. At the same session, the

Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) set forth the priorities of the new United Nations body. She discussed avenues for cooperation with parliaments and parliamentarians with a view to advancing gender equality and the political empowerment of women. The Executive Directors of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) attended the 126th IPU Assembly in Kampala in April 2011 and debated issues relating to maternal and child health, sustainable development, and HIV/AIDS and the law.

8. At the assemblies, IPU member parliaments have adopted resolutions on major issues confronting the international community. Capturing the views of majority and opposition members from most parliaments in the world, they offer a uniquely rich political contribution to the work of the United Nations. The resolutions also identify action parliaments can take in support of United Nations efforts and are taken back to parliaments for further consideration and follow-up. The resolutions were circulated in the General Assembly and its subsidiary bodies under relevant agenda items.

9. Recent resolutions have addressed the humanitarian response to natural disasters in Pakistan and Somalia, the prevention of electoral violence and the promotion of the smooth transition of power, transparency and accountability in the funding of political parties and election campaigns, strengthening democratic reform in emerging democracies including in North Africa and the Middle East, sustainable development and the management of demographic change, the redistribution of power and wealth, and maternal and child health.

10. The IPU Committee on United Nations Affairs replicates at the global level the practice that some parliaments have instituted (for example, the Bundestag of Germany) to create a dedicated committee for addressing matters relating to the United Nations. The Committee has continued to hold hearings with United Nations officials and debate and draft parliamentary input to United Nations processes. Legislators attending the Committee's sessions have reviewed actions taken in parliaments to implement international commitments. The Committee's 2011 session included discussions on nuclear disarmament, cultural diversity and the Alliance of Civilizations, sustainable development and the promotion of the green economy, follow-up to the fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries and the seventeenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

III. Integrating the concerns of parliaments into major United Nations processes

11. IPU has been instrumental in organizing a parliamentary dimension to major world conferences. This has proved to be of significant value. It has enriched the proceedings and allowed parliamentary views and concerns to be reflected in the proceedings and outcomes. It has helped build political support for the implementation of the outcome of these events. In recognition thereof, the General Assembly decided, in its resolution 65/123, to engage more systematically with IPU in integrating a parliamentary component of, and contribution to, major United Nations deliberative processes and the review of international commitments.

12. During the reporting period, parliaments contributed to a number of United Nations processes, such as the 2011 High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on AIDS (New York), the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries (Istanbul), the sixteenth and seventeenth sessions of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (Cancun, Mexico, and Durban, South Africa) and the annual parliamentary event on the occasion of the fifty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (New York).

13. All of these instances shared a number of common features: parliamentarians were encouraged to join their national delegations to these events; a parliamentary meeting was organized in conjunction with the main United Nations conference; and a formal parliamentary contribution was submitted to the United Nations process and was reflected in varying degrees in the respective outcome documents.

The parliamentary track of the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries

14. The parliamentary contribution to the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries stands out as a good practice worth replicating and further developing in the future. It took place over an extended period of time, captured several dimensions at once, and combined political and operational elements in a mutually reinforcing way. It began at a very early stage and was organized as a clearly identifiable parliamentary track within the broader intergovernmental process.

15. Assisted by IPU, parliaments were directly involved in and provided input to the national progress reviews of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010. In parallel to the national process, IPU held consultations with members of parliament to garner their views on the new agreement for the 2011-2020 decade. IPU participated in the inter-agency group meetings organized by the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States to coordinate United Nations system activities in support of the preparatory process for the Conference, and followed the intergovernmental negotiations, putting forward the parliamentary viewpoints as they emerged from the consultations.

16. As preparations advanced for the Istanbul Conference, the High Representative and the host Government encouraged the participation of legislators from the least developed countries, from both majority and opposition parties, as members of their national delegations to the main United Nations event in Istanbul. Together, IPU, the United Nations and the Parliament of the host country convened a parliamentary forum during the Istanbul Conference. The forum served to inform approximately 200 parliamentarians about the main elements of the new international agreement.

17. As a result, the outcome document of the Conference contained, for the first time, strong provisions to ensure national ownership and follow-up of the Istanbul Programme of Action by national parliaments. A five-year joint United Nations/IPU project proposal to support the mainstreaming of the Programme of Action through parliaments has been developed and is now awaiting implementation, pending the obtainment of funding.

18. The multi-stakeholder Development Cooperation Forum, in which parliamentarians can participate with Government representatives, civil society, local authorities and a number of other development cooperation practitioners, provides another setting for the concerns of parliaments to be heard at the United Nations. Assisted by IPU, Development Cooperation Forum meetings held in 2011 and in the second quarter of 2012 (Mali, Luxembourg, Australia) provided opportunities for parliamentarians to discuss such questions as how to better target aid to the least developed countries, how to leverage aid to enhance development effectiveness, and how to make aid consistent with the sustainable development agenda. In many ways, the political input of parliamentarians has complemented the more technical deliberations. More importantly, the engagement of parliaments in the Forum has helped raise awareness of the role of parliaments in the oversight of aid commitments and related accountability processes at both the national and global levels.

19. For several years, IPU and the Office of the President of the General Assembly have been jointly convening annual parliamentary hearings at the United Nations. The aim of the hearings is to foster interaction between parliamentarians, diplomats, United Nations officials and academics on issues that are high on the international agenda. The summary reports from the hearings are circulated in both the Assembly and among national parliaments. The most recent parliamentary hearing, held in late November 2011, focused on political accountability for a more peaceful and prosperous world. It addressed modalities for more effective youth and civil society participation, budget transparency and the role of the Assembly in strengthening global political accountability.

IV. Parliamentary oversight of international commitments

20. Over the past decade, the joint United Nations/IPU efforts to forge a parliamentary dimension to the work of the United Nations have been underpinned by the common understanding that parliaments and their members have a vital role to play in ensuring respect for, and implementation of, international commitments. Parliaments have a wide range of tools at their disposal to ensure that national laws, policies, actions, programmes and budgets reflect the principles and obligations contained in various international instruments.

21. Over the years, many United Nations agencies and bodies have worked closely with IPU in developing handbooks, guides and other tools for parliamentarians that focus on the main international commitments. Subjects covered have included international humanitarian law, refugee protection, rights of the child, democratic oversight of the security sector, small arms and light weapons, elimination of discrimination against women, gender budgeting, rights of persons with disabilities, human trafficking, and HIV/AIDS and the law. Many of these publications have been translated into several languages and have served to inspire good practices, legislative reform and other forms of parliamentary action in support of global commitments.

22. By working with United Nations human rights treaty bodies, IPU has helped to empower parliaments in the national review of international commitments. In recognition of this work, General Assembly resolution 65/123 encourages IPU to strengthen its contribution to the United Nations human rights treaty body system

and to the Human Rights Council, particularly as it relates to the universal periodic review of the fulfilment of human rights obligations and commitments by Member States. The experience developed in relation to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women offers valuable insights as to the way forward with other United Nations treaty bodies and review mechanisms.

Parliamentary participation in the work of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

23. To date, the most successful form of parliamentary oversight of international commitments has taken place in the context of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. IPU works with the parliaments of the countries under review so that they can take part in the review process, provide input to the national report, attend the session of the Committee and receive the Committee's findings for consideration and action by parliament.

24. The Committee now systematically monitors the level of parliamentary involvement in the reporting process and receives IPU reports at each of its sessions. It also systematically adopts a recommendation that parliaments should receive a copy of the Committee's conclusions, and has adopted a statement recommending that States parties ensure the full participation of parliament and its members in the reporting process and the full implementation of the Convention and its Protocol.

V. Parliaments and the United Nations at the national level

25. The Advisory Group set up by the IPU Committee on United Nations Affairs continued to examine the implementation of "Delivering as one" reform and system-wide coherence at the national level. Following field missions to the United Republic of Tanzania (2008) and Viet Nam (2009), the Advisory Group undertook a third mission to Ghana and Sierra Leone in May 2011. It issued a report with recommendations addressed to parliaments and the United Nations on how to facilitate greater parliamentary involvement in national development strategies.

26. The conclusions from the field missions confirmed the findings of the 2010 global parliamentary survey, presented at the Third World Conference of Speakers of Parliaments and reflected in the outcome Declaration. While parliamentary engagement with the United Nations at the international level has been growing steadily over the years, there remains potential for further interaction between parliaments and the United Nations at the national level.

27. Of particular importance is the engagement of national parliaments in the elaboration of national development strategies. The emerging good practice of some United Nations country teams, which have reached out in a more substantive manner to the parliamentary leadership and the select committees in an attempt to include parliament in national consultation, evaluation and validation mechanisms, provides an encouraging example that should be followed elsewhere.

28. IPU has worked with several United Nations country offices when implementing over 20 technical assistance programmes aimed at strengthening national parliaments' capacities and infrastructure in Afghanistan, Algeria, Cambodia, the Central African Republic, the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the

Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Liberia, Maldives, Pakistan, Palestine, Rwanda, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Sudan, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Togo, the United Arab Emirates and Viet Nam. IPU benefited from the collective expertise and know-how of its members, which is a unique asset as it builds capacity in parliaments and promotes sound democratic practices.

Parliaments and United Nations country teams

29. The "Delivering as one" reform process offers an opportunity to build greater coherence and effectiveness in the provision of development aid and capacity-building to national parliaments. All too often, parliamentary assistance programmes have been driven by supply rather than by demand. This has resulted in fragmentation, an absence of ownership and commitment and limited results. Parliaments should therefore be increasingly included in efforts to align development programmes with the priorities set by the national authorities.

30. The case of Ghana provides a positive example of a United Nations country team working with a national parliament in an exemplary way. There, the "United Nations-Parliament partnership in promoting Millennium Development Goal attainment", signed in August 2010 by the Parliament and the heads of 14 United Nations agencies in the country, has contributed to a more structured cooperation between the United Nations, Government ministries and parliamentary select committees with a view to enhancing legislative response, policy integration and review in various fields related to the Millennium Development Goals.

VI. Recommendations

31. Interaction between the United Nations, national parliaments and IPU ranges from the political to the operational and touches on virtually all areas of policy. The modalities of the interaction have evolved to include several innovative approaches. Looking ahead towards the further development of this interaction, the Secretary-General wishes to make the following recommendations.

32. The United Nations system and Member States could more systematically facilitate a substantive parliamentary component to major international processes, following the good practice recently developed in the context of the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries.

33. The United Nations and IPU could endeavour to more closely link the annual parliamentary hearings to major United Nations deliberative and negotiating processes, including the preparation of global United Nations conferences. The outcome of the parliamentary hearings could thus better serve to bring a parliamentary input to such consultations and outcome documents.

34. Member States should encourage their parliaments to provide input to the drafting of States parties' reports to United Nations treaty bodies and the Human Rights Council as well as involving them in the follow-up to the bodies' recommendations. United Nations treaty bodies should develop modes of cooperation with IPU and national parliaments along the lines of the cooperation developed in recent years between IPU, the Committee on the Elimination of

Discrimination against Women and national parliaments whose countries are under review.

35. The emerging good practice of the United Nations at the country level, reaching out in a more substantive manner to the parliamentary leadership and the select committees in an attempt to include parliament in national consultation, evaluation and validation mechanisms, provides an encouraging example that could be followed elsewhere.

36. The United Nations, at the country level, could more systematically draw upon the unique expertise of IPU and its member parliaments in strengthening parliamentary institutions, particularly in countries emerging from conflict and/or undergoing democratization processes.

37. In keeping with General Assembly resolution 65/123, a regular annual exchange between the United Nations Chief Executives Board for Coordination and the senior leadership of IPU should be held, with a view to building greater coherence in the work of the two organizations and maximizing parliamentary support for the United Nations.

38. The United Nations system itself could engage more closely and more proactively with the IPU Committee on United Nations Affairs and its Advisory Group, with a view to examining lessons learned, identifying good practices and further enhancing the strategic partnership between the United Nations and IPU.

39. A new cooperation agreement could be concluded between the United Nations and IPU to replace the outdated agreement of 1996, in line with developments over the past decade and a half.

40. In light of the evolving partnership between the United Nations, national parliaments and IPU, the General Assembly may wish to further explore the modalities and benefits of this interaction, and continue to include this subject as a separate item in its agenda.

Annex

List of joint activities conducted by the United Nations, national parliaments and the Inter-Parliamentary Union since September 2010

I. Democracy and human rights

1. The *Global Parliamentary Report*, a joint publication by IPU and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), was launched in April 2012. The result of two years of extensive research with the involvement of many of the IPU member parliaments, the report focuses on the evolving relationship between citizens and parliaments. It seeks to tap into the experience of institutions and individual politicians in order to identify existing challenges and public pressures, and provide examples of good practice to better meet the expectations of citizens.

2. The joint annual IPU/United Nations parliamentary hearing on "Strengthening political accountability for a more peaceful and prosperous world" was held in New York in November 2011. The hearing was attended by over 180 members of parliament and professional staff, and focused on issues relating to the role of the United Nations in strengthening global accountability, youth participation in the democratic process, enhancing the links between national institutions and civil society, as well as good practices for budget transparency.

3. The International Day of Democracy on 15 September 2011 was promoted widely to parliaments through a series of events and publications at the behest of IPU. Over 35 national parliaments and regional parliamentary organizations have reported their own activities and initiatives to mark the International Day of Democracy.

4. The Department of Political Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat and International IDEA convened a series of round tables on the promotion of democracy, in which IPU participated and contributed to the sessions devoted to gender equality and democracy (May 2011), and human rights and democracy (July 2011).

5. The United Nations and IPU, through the Global Centre for Information and Communication Technologies in Parliament, organized the 2010 World e-Parliament Conference in Johannesburg, South Africa, in October 2010. The Conference addressed, inter alia, relations between parliaments and the media in the context of new information and communications technologies. The Johannesburg Conference was followed by a joint international meeting on "Achieving greater transparency in legislatures through the use of open document standards", held at the United States Congress in Washington, D.C., in February 2012.

6. A parliamentary forum on "The triple challenge of cybersecurity: information, citizens and infrastructure" was held in Geneva in May 2011, organized within the framework of the Global Centre for Information and Communication Technologies in Parliament. The forum was part of the ongoing dialogue in the run-up to the World Summit on the Information Society follow-up conference in 2015. It addressed the particular challenges posed by the illicit use of information and communications technologies.

7. An international parliamentary conference on "Parliaments, minorities and indigenous peoples: effective participation in politics" was held in Chiapas, Mexico, in October 2010. The conference was organized in partnership with UNDP, the Parliament of Mexico and the Government of the State of Chiapas, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Independent Expert on Minority Issues and Minority Rights Group International. The conference concluded with the adoption of the Chiapas Declaration, aimed at curbing discrimination and providing for the effective participation of minorities and indigenous peoples in decision-making.

8. Together with UNDP, IPU published a number of studies regarding the rights of minorities and indigenous peoples: "The representation of minorities and indigenous peoples in parliament: a global overview", "Diversity in parliament: listening to the voices of minorities and indigenous peoples" and "Case studies on the representation of minorities and indigenous peoples in parliament".

9. In cooperation with OHCHR, in October 2010 IPU held a seminar entitled "Implementing the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: what part for parliaments?". The seminar sought to familiarize parliamentarians with the rights enshrined in the international covenants, the functioning of the United Nations monitoring committees and the contribution that parliaments can make to their work. The event also addressed the scope and practical implications of the right to freedom of expression and the right to work in a globalized world.

10. IPU and UNICEF organized a regional seminar for parliaments of the Central and East European region on "Making child rights a reality for the most vulnerable children". The seminar was hosted by the National Assembly of Armenia in Yerevan in June 2011 and provided an introduction to the international regime of children's rights and how it has been applied in the region. Special focus was placed on violence against children.

11. IPU took part in the twelfth inter-committee meeting of the human rights treaty bodies, held in Geneva in June 2011. The purpose of the meeting was for the committees to adopt a coordinated approach with a view to enhancing the effectiveness of the treaty bodies. IPU presented an overview of the assistance it provided to its members in terms of strengthening their capacities to promote human rights through close involvement in the work of the various United Nations human rights mechanisms.

12. The President of the Human Rights Council and a select group of Member States engaged in informal discussions on the most appropriate modalities for an enhanced role of parliaments in the Council, and in particular in regard to the universal periodic review of implementation of human rights commitments. A joint event on this subject was held in Geneva on 9 March 2012 on the occasion of the nineteenth session of the Council.

II. Gender equality

13. The Executive Director of UN-Women addressed the annual parliamentary meetings on the occasion of the 2011 and 2012 sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women. The Executive Director also gave the keynote address at the 124th

IPU Assembly in Panama City. Following that meeting, a mechanism of regular consultations was instituted between IPU and UN-Women to identify and carry forward opportunities for joint action.

14. The 2012 edition of the IPU/UN-Women world map of women in politics, which presents country data of women in parliaments and executive offices, was launched in the second quarter of 2012. The map highlights progress in the participation of women in national parliaments. Together with the UNDP Parliamentary Development Initiative in the Arab Region, IPU issued a report on gender-sensitive parliaments in Arab States.

15. IPU, together with UN-Women, organized a one-day meeting for parliamentarians attending the fifty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women in February 2012. The theme of the meeting was "Empowering rural women: what role for parliaments?", with a focus on strategies to empower rural women, including from the perspective of their political participation. The outcome of the parliamentary meeting was presented at a plenary meeting of the Commission. In the course of that same week, the United Nations/IPU joint publication *Women in Politics: 2012* was launched at United Nations Headquarters in New York.

16. The annual parliamentary meeting on the occasion of the fifty-fifth session of the Commission on the Status of Women in February 2011 brought together legislators to examine "The role of parliaments in promoting access to and participation of women and girls in education, training, science and technology". During the same week, IPU held a joint event with UNDP on political violence against women and another independently on the role of parliaments in advancing the achievement of Millennium Development Goals 4 and 5 on reducing child mortality and improving maternal health.

17. IPU reported to the forty-ninth session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in July 2011 on IPU activities and parliamentary involvement in the reporting process on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Recent technical assistance provided by IPU to parliaments on gender equality includes continued consultations with the parliaments of Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Mali, Rwanda and Togo in support of legislative reform, including in the area of combating violence against women. Four of the eight countries under review by the Committee at its forty-ninth session reported some form of parliamentary involvement in the national review process.

18. In cooperation with OHCHR, IPU held a seminar on legislating for women's rights in October 2010. The seminar focused on the definition of discrimination, mainstreaming gender in the legislative process and monitoring the enforcement of laws. It also dealt with the role of parliaments in implementing the Convention and, in particular, on ways and means of enhancing cooperation between the Committee, national parliaments and IPU.

19. In June 2011, IPU, UN-Women, the Government of Egypt, UNDP, International IDEA, iKNOW Politics and the Swedish Institute Alexandria organized a round table in Cairo entitled "Pathways for women in democratic transitions: international experiences and lessons learned". The round table explored paths towards democratic transition, good governance, gender equality and social justice. Discussions were also held on electoral law and women's representation.

20. In May 2011, IPU, UNDP-Jordan and the Jordanian House of Representatives held a session on gender equality and women's rights for Jordanian parliamentarians. The event focused on achievements and remaining challenges in implementing the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in Jordan.

III. Sustainable development

21. IPU worked closely with the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States in preparation for the Fourth Conference on the Least Developed Countries, held in Istanbul in May 2011. As coordinator of the parliamentary track to the Conference, IPU made inputs to the outcome document of the Conference and co-organized the parliamentary forum on the eve of the Conference with the Grand National Assembly of Turkey.

22. As a result, the outcome document of the Conference, the Istanbul Programme of Action, contains important new commitments on the role of parliaments. A follow-up joint project between IPU and the Office was launched together with a fundraising effort for the project. A joint project proposal with the Office is being developed to help implement new least developed country commitments for the next decade. As a first step towards the implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action through parliaments, IPU and the Office convened a first national seminar in Cambodia in December 2011.

23. The first high-level symposium in preparation for the 2012 Development Cooperation Forum was held in Mali in May. IPU contributed substantively to the agenda of the meeting and helped facilitate the participation of parliamentarians as one of the main stakeholder groups. The second symposium took place in Luxembourg in mid-October and focused on the catalytic role of aid. Both meetings also helped enhance the parliamentary dimension of the Fourth High-level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, held in Busan, Republic of Korea, where a one-day parliamentary forum was also organized in November 2011.

24. The 2010 parliamentary hearing at the United Nations was entitled "Towards economic recovery: rethinking development, retooling global governance" and took place in December 2010. Nearly 160 members of parliament, together with United Nations officials, ambassadors and civil society experts, attended the event and examined aspects relating to the structural imbalances in the global economy, the reform of the international financial system, the rethinking of sustainable development within the current global framework, and the relationship between the United Nations and the G-20 in global economic governance.

25. On 28 June 2011, at the fifty-third executive session of the Trade and Development Board, the governing body of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), participants decided to align the modalities of UNCTAD cooperation with IPU with the practices of the General Assembly, thereby granting observer status to IPU.

26. IPU held parliamentary meetings in conjunction with the sixteenth and seventeenth sessions of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, held in Cancun, Mexico, and Durban,

South Africa. The meetings were co-organized with the respective Parliaments of Mexico and South Africa. The UNDP Office in Mexico cooperated closely with IPU in preparing for the meeting in Cancun. In both instances, a parliamentary declaration was addressed to the main United Nations events.

27. The annual 2011 session of the Parliamentary Conference on the World Trade Organization (WTO) was held in Geneva in March 2011. For the first time ever, the session was held on WTO premises and was organized with the support of WTO. A unique tool for parliamentary scrutiny of international trade policies, the Conference is a joint undertaking of IPU and the European Parliament. It serves as the de facto parliamentary dimension of WTO.

28. As part of the WTO public forum that was held in Geneva from 19 to 21 September 2011, IPU and the European Parliament organized a parliamentary panel entitled "Trade in natural resources: a curse or blessing? A parliamentary perspective". The event drew attention to the political, economic and environmental aspects of the exploitation and trade of natural resources as one of the pillars of the global economy. Its conclusions contributed to the broader agenda for greater parliamentary engagement in the international trade negotiations led by WTO.

29. A parliamentary briefing organized by the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) was held at United Nations Headquarters in June 2011, on the occasion of the high-level meeting on the comprehensive review of the progress achieved in realizing the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS and the Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS. Some 80 members of parliament participated in the discussion, which focused on discriminatory laws that impede full access to prevention and treatment by those most at risk of the disease. The outcome document of the high-level meeting acknowledged the important role of parliaments in setting the legislative framework for an effective response to HIV/AIDS.[a]

30. IPU has joined the UNAIDS-led International Advisory Group on Universal Access. The Advisory Group will guide a global vision of the country and regional findings from the 2010/2011 universal access review process. It will produce a "leadership statement" reflecting the recognized global priorities and mapping the way forward to 2015 to scale up comprehensive national AIDS responses with a view to achieving universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support.

31. UNAIDS supported side events during IPU assemblies to raise awareness among members of parliaments about the role of parliaments in combating the disease. UNAIDS and UNDP also contributed inputs to the IPU Advisory Group on HIV/AIDS. A programme funding agreement was established with UNAIDS with respect to HIV-related activities, which included the publication of a series of "Briefs for parliamentarians on HIV and AIDS".

32. IPU continued to support the consultations of the Global Commission on HIV and the Law by ensuring the involvement of members of parliament in the various regions. The Commission's report reflects many of their inputs.

33. IPU and UNICEF held a regional workshop on "Children and AIDS: the social protection response, the role of parliaments" in Windhoek, Namibia, in October 2010. Participants at the workshop examined the need to establish parliamentary

[a] A/65/L.77.

mechanisms and build on good practices to develop a comprehensive response to the needs of children affected by HIV/AIDS.

34. As part of the global campaign to achieve the health-related Millennium Development Goals and in support of the Global Strategy on Women's and Children's Health launched by the Secretary-General, IPU announced its commitment to the Global Strategy in July 2011. This commitment would involve mobilizing support for the Global Strategy within the world parliamentary community, as well as providing targeted assistance to parliaments with a view to enhancing their legislative and oversight functions in the area of child and maternal health. This was the case in Kenya and Uganda, where parliamentary retreats were organized in December 2011.

35. Previously that year, in the wings of the 124th IPU Assembly in Panama City, IPU, in collaboration with the Every Woman Every Child Campaign and the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health, jointly organized a round table entitled "Parliamentarians taking the lead on maternal, newborn and child health". Participants underscored what parliaments were required to do in the areas of legislative reform, budget-setting and monitoring, advocacy and oversight, highlighting issues and challenges that need to be addressed in order to successfully promote women's and children's health.

IV. International peace and security

36. A parliamentary briefing was held in September 2011 in cooperation with the President of the General Assembly on the main theme of the opening debate of the Assembly: "The role of mediation in the settlement of disputes by peaceful means". The briefing was aimed at members of parliament participating in the opening segment of the Assembly, which also saw thematic debates on non-communicable diseases, nuclear energy safety, desertification and racism.

37. The Peacebuilding Commission continued to engage with IPU and the parliaments of the countries currently on the agenda of the Commission, in particular the Central African Republic, Burundi and Sierra Leone. Based on needs assessments conducted in the respective parliaments, a series of technical assistance and capacity-building projects have been undertaken while others are awaiting funding.

38. Based on the 2009 IPU resolution on the "Role of parliaments in promoting nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation", IPU has continued its efforts in support of the Secretary-General's five-point plan for a nuclear-weapons-free world. These included a series of round tables and panel debates in the context of the annual IPU assemblies, as well as the publication in 2012 of a "Handbook for parliamentarians on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation".

39. Consultations were initiated in early 2012 between IPU and the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, with a view to developing joint initiatives aimed at enhancing the legal and institutional ability of Member States to counter terrorist activities.